MYSTIC
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CIRESS

is a world where magic dominates every aspect of daily life. For centuries, seven Guilds of magic have presided over this enchanted globe, owing much to the **Eternal Spirits** of their original Guild Masters. Living on as ethereal phantoms, each Eternal Spirit provided their Guild's current Master with timeless wisdom and sorcerous knowledge.

This ancient balance of power was shattered on the day **Genevieve Villard** was to become Master of the Nouveau Guild. At Gen's Rite of Ascension, a mysterious stranger imprinted a mystical sigil on the palm of her rebellious sister, **Giselle**. When the Sigil's power drew all seven Eternal Spirits into Giselle, a turbulent new era dawned for Ciress. Granted vast magical might, Giselle Villard reluctantly became the most powerful Mystic her world has ever known!

RECENTLY:

Giselle has embarked on a pilgrimage to each of the seven Guild nations to learn each Guild's unique philosophy of magic and way of life. Having already won over the Nouveau and Shaman Guilds, Giselle now visits **Master Atyaah** of the Djinn Guild...

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"BACK WHEN I WAS NINETEEN YEARS OLD, I MET A GUY NAMED *PATRIC*. HE WAS THE FIRST *MAGICIAN*--ASIDE FROM MY SISTER--WHO I'D ALLOWED AROUND ME SINCE...
"...WELL, SINCE JUST AFTER THE *ACCIDENT* WITH MY PARENTS...
"PATRIC WAS ONE OF THOSE GUYS WHO DIDN'T WANT TO MASTER ONE SCHOOL OF SORCERY--HE WANTED TO MASTER *ALL* OF THEM.
"SO I SAT THROUGH ONE BORING PRACTICE SESSION AFTER ANOTHER BECAUSE I THOUGHT I WAS IN LOVE.
"WHEN HE ARRANGED A YEAR-LONG WORK-STUDY ASSIGNMENT IN THE *DJINN LANDS*, I TOLD PATRIC I'D WAIT FOR HIM TO COME BACK.
"AFTER THREE MONTHS, THE LETTERS STOPPED COMING. I WORRIED THAT SOMETHING BAD HAD HAPPENED TO HIM AND WENT TO FIND HIM MYSELF.
"AND THAT'S WHEN I LEARNED THAT NOT EVERY DISAPPEARING ACT IS DONE BY MAGIC. SOMETIMES ALL IT TAKES IS *SMOKE* AND *MIRRORS*..."

C'MON, CUT ME A LITTLE SLACK. I MEAN, I CAME HERE HOPING YOU'D *TEACH* ME SOMETHING ABOUT THE DJINN GUILD.
I THOUGHT I'D BE DOING MORE *LISTENING* THAN TALKING.
THEN YOUR *FIRST* LESSON ABOUT US IS THAT WE KNOW THE VALUE OF A GOOD STORY:
WE HAVE A FAMOUS LEGEND ABOUT A GIRL NAMED *JINAI,* WHO WAS CAGED BY THE PRINCE OF THE NETHER PLANES. PERHAPS YOU'VE HEARD IT?
SHE WAS *FORCED* TO TELL HIM ONE STORY AFTER ANOTHER -- THE MOMENT SHE BEGAN TO BORE HIM, SHE WOULD SURELY BE PUT TO DEATH.
WAIT A MINUTE...I THINK I SAW THIS ON THE *LATE SHOW* ONCE.
DOESN'T SHE CONVINCE HIM TO *FREE* HER BY THE END, OR SOMETHING?
I HAVE NO IDEA HOW THE NOUVEAU ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY HAS CORRUPTED THE *SONGS OF JINAI.*
WHAT I DO KNOW IS THAT THE WISDOM, VALUES AND *SPIRIT* OF A PEOPLE ARE FOUND IN THEIR *LORE.* TELL ME A TALE, AND YOU REVEAL WHO YOU *ARE.*
LISTEN NOW, GISELLE VILLARD. *I* WILL TELL YOU OF THE *BOOK OF CREATION,* AND YOU WILL BETTER UNDERSTAND WHO *WE* ARE...

"IN THE BEGINNING, THE GREAT MOTHER WHO MADE THE UNIVERSE AND WHO CREATED CIRESS ALSO BEGAT THREE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SENTIENT BEINGS.
"SHE CREATED THE ANGELS FROM LIGHT ITSELF. SHE MADE THE HUMANS OUT OF CLAY. AND SHE MADE THE DJINNS OUT OF SMOKELESS FIRE.
"THESE SAME THREE RACES OF SENTIENT BEINGS SHARED CIRESS FOR UNTOLD EONS.
"NOW, THE ANGELS HAVE WITHDRAWN ALMOST ENTIRELY FROM WORLDLY LIFE. BUT THE HUMANS AND THE DJINNS ARE BOTH STILL VIGOROUSLY ENGAGED WITH WORLDLY CONCERNS."

AND...?
AND WHAT?
THAT'S IT? THAT'S THE STORY?
WELL...
THAT'S NOT A STORY. THAT'S JUST THE SET-UP. THE ANGELS AND HUMANS AND DJINNS HAVE TO DO SOMETHING, DON'T THEY?
AND...AND WHAT THE HEX IS "SMOKELESS FIRE" ANYWAY?
IT'S... PURE FIRE... ESSENTIAL FLAME...
DON'T GET MIRED IN DETAILS. THE HEART OF THE STORY IS THAT HUMANS ARE NOT THE CREATOR'S ONLY CHILDREN, NOR EVEN HER MOST FAVORED.
THE HUMAN RACE SHARES THIS WORLD WITH UNSEEN BEINGS THAT ARE AS WORTHY AS ANY PERSON.
TOO OFTEN, HUMANS SEE THEMSELVES AS THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE. IT'S HEALTHY TO REMEMBER THAT THEY ARE NOT.
SO IS THERE MORE TO THAT MYTH? WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE HUMANS AND THE DJINNS?
I SHALL TELL YOU. BUT FIRST, IT IS YOUR TURN TO TELL ME A STORY.
ANOTHER...? MAN, THIS IS SO NOT WHAT I EXPECTED.
I MEAN, THE SHAMAN MASTER WAS ALL MAD AT ME FOR NOT HELPING HIM REBUILD HIS LANDS AFTER ANIMORA'S LAST INVASION.
I FIGURED IT'D BE THE SAME WITH YOU.
INSTEAD, THE PLACE LOOKS GREAT AND ALL YOU WANT IS TO FLIP THROUGH MY DIARY.
ARE YOU GOING TO CRITICIZE ME FOR NOT RESENTING YOU, OR ARE YOU GOING TO BE A GOOD GUEST AND TELL YOUR HOST A TALE?
OKAY. SORRY...

"LET'S SEE...
"OKAY, WHEN OUR PARENTS PASSED AWAY, MY OLDER SISTER GEN AND I REACTED IN VERY DIFFERENT WAYS.
"SHE THREW HERSELF INTO HER STUDY OF NOUVEAU GUILD MAGIC. I THREW MYSELF INTO MY OWN STUDY...OF BOYS.
"BUT GEN REFUSED TO ADMIT I WAS HOPELESS AT MAGIC. SHE KEPT TRYING TO TEACH ME --
"--AND, JUST AS DOGGEDLY, I'D FAIL, HOPING SHE'D FINALLY GIVE UP ON IT.
"AFTER A COUPLE OF YEARS, GEN HIRED A TUTOR FOR ME. SHE THOUGHT I WAS FAILING BECAUSE SHE LACKED TEACHING SKILLS.
"THAT'S GEN FOR YOU. IT NEVER OCCURRED TO HER THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO LEARN ALL THAT NOUVEAU JUNK. SO I DECIDED THAT MY TUTOR JUST MIGHT SERVE A PURPOSE AFTER ALL.
"FINALLY, SHE UNDERSTOOD. AFTER THAT, SHE LET ME BE ME AND I LET HER BE HER, AND WE ALL GOT ALONG MUCH BETTER."

Ah. SHE COULD NOT SEE THE TRUTH RIGHT IN FRONT OF HER, SO YOU FORCED HER BEYOND THE AMBITIONS SHE IMPOSED UPON YOU.
NOT BAD, GISELLE. YOU ARE A BETTER STORYTELLER THAN YOU LET ON.
Oh, PLEASE... YOU'RE TOO KIND...
WOW.
SAY, WHEN DID YOU GUYS REBUILD? LOOKS LIKE ANIMORA'S INVASION BARELY LEFT A SCRATCH, BUT I'D HEARD THE DJINN LANDS WERE ESPECIALLY HARD-HIT.
YES...WELL, WE HAD OUR SHARE OF SUFFERING. BUT, AS I SAID, THE WORKS OF MAN ARE NOT THE ONLY POWER IN THIS LAND. OUR FRIENDS, THE DJINNS, TOOK PITY AND LENT US THEIR AID.
RIGHT. THE DJINNS. TELL ME MORE ABOUT THEM. IT SEEMED LIKE YOU WERE GOING SOMEWHERE WITH THAT.
YES. I'LL TAKE UP FROM JUST AFTER THE CREATION...

"AS WITH HUMANS, DJINNS CAME IN ALL TYPES, BOTH GOOD AND BAD -- THE WORST OF WHICH WERE THE *GHULS* AND THE *IFRITS*. BUT, BY AND LARGE, THERE WAS HARMONY BETWEEN MAN AND DJINN.
"THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, HUMAN AND DJINN HOLY MEN WORSHIPPED SIDE BY SIDE--
"--UNTIL THE IFRIT NAMED *IBLIS* CAME TO RULE OVER HIS KIND.
"THE CREATOR WAS OFFENDED THAT HER DIVINE JUDGMENT SHOULD EVEN BE QUESTIONED. SHE PUNISHED IBLIS FOR HIS HUBRIS BY DISOWNING ALL DJINNS."
"*PROUD* IBLIS, WHO APPROACHED THE CREATOR AND DEMANDED TO KNOW WHY THE SONS OF ESSENTIAL FLAME SHOULD HAVE TO *SHARE* A WORLD WITH THOSE BORN OF CLAY.

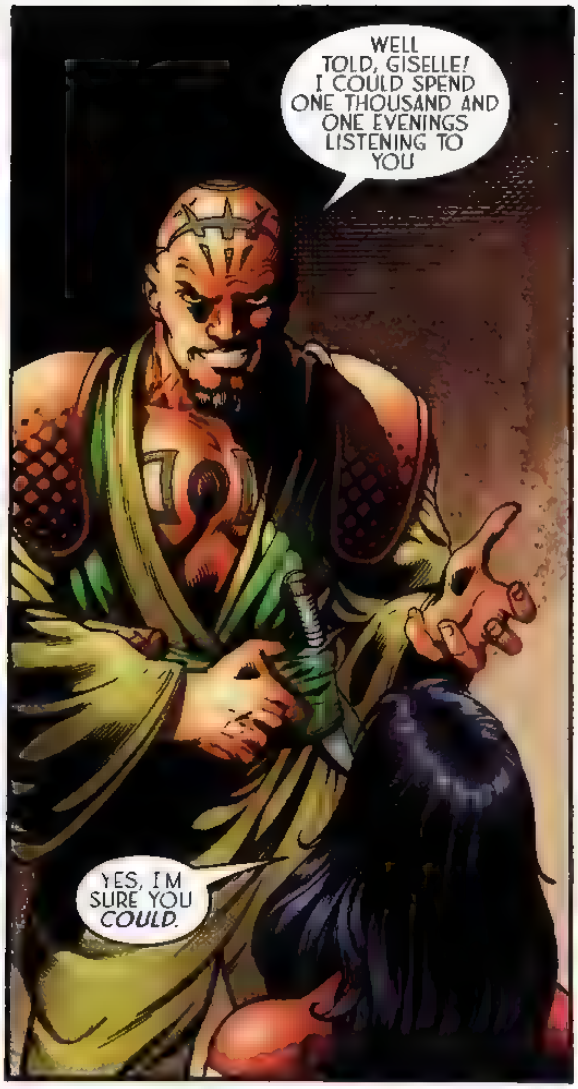
"CUT OFF FROM THE POWER OF CREATION, THE DJINNS FELL *ILL*. THEIR SMOKELESS FLAME GUTTERED IN THE COLD WIND OF THE CREATOR'S INDIFFERENCE.
"IBLIS *REPENTED*, BUT THE CREATOR WOULD NOT HEAR HIM, SO HE SWALLOWED HIS PRIDE AND ASKED THE *HUMANS* TO HELP *RESTORE* THE DJINNS IN THE CREATOR'S SIGHT.
"IT WAS THIS *COLLABORATION* OF MAN AND DJINN THAT LED TO THE *INVENTION* OF MAGIC.
"THEY FOUND THAT CIRESS WAS BLESSED WITH A WEALTH OF UNSEEN *UNIVERSAL ENERGY*, FOREVER DENIED TO THE DJINNS BY THE CREATOR'S CURSE...
"UNLESS A HUMAN MAGICIAN *CHANNELED* IT, ALTERING IT JUST ENOUGH SO THE DJINNS COULD DRINK OF IT AND RESTORE THEMSELVES.
"THE DJINNS WERE SAVED.
"IBLIS AND HIS KIND *NEVER* FORGOT THAT THE SONS OF CLAY WERE THE *KEY* TO THEIR SALVATION."

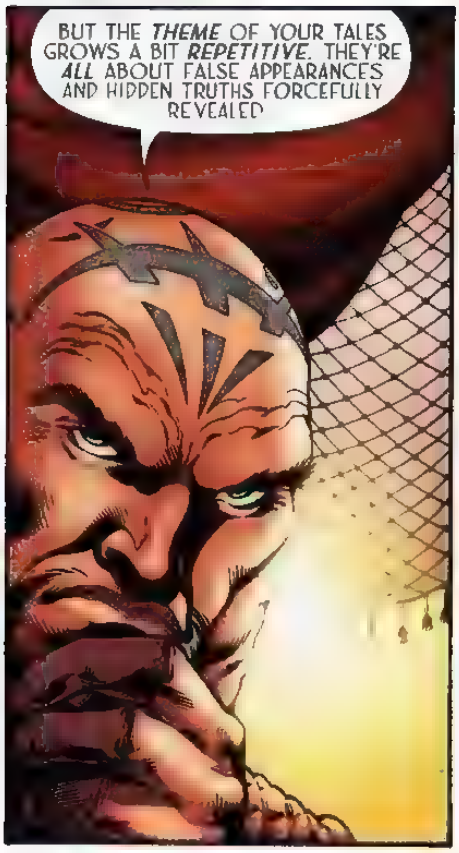
WAIT A MINUTE SO YOU'RE TELLING ME THIS IS HOW MAGIC WAS *INVENTED?*
THERE WEREN'T *ANY* GUILDS BEFORE ALL THIS HAPPENED?!
THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT I AM SAYING
Psst! Hey
SKITTER--! DO YOU *MIND?*
But
THE DJINN GUILD WAS THE *FIRST* MAGICAL GUILD IN HISTORY. ITS MAGIC WAS INVENTED, NOT TO BENEFIT HUMANS, BUT TO SAVE THE DJINNS.
Hey kid. Take five.
EVERY SUBSEQUENT SCHOOL OF MAGIC HAS *FURTHERED* THE PROCESS OF ENERGY CONVERSION THAT SUSTAINS THE DJINNS.
Psst. *NOW,* is set e'
DID YOUR *SQUIT* JUST ?
SOMETIMES WHEN HE'S *GASSY,* IT ALMOST SOUNDS LIKE HE'S *TALKING.* SCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT...

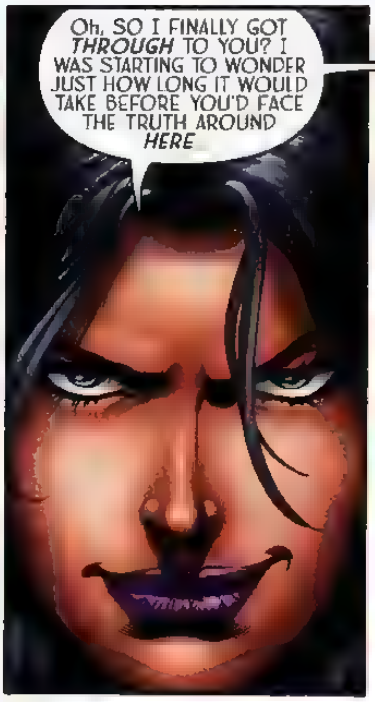
YES, SKITTER. I KNOW. I ALREADY KNOW, AND I'M HANDLING IT
JUST HAVE A LITTLE FAITH IN ME. OKAY?
WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT THAT IT CAN'T WAIT?
Somethin FUNNY going on here, kid. Haven't you NOTICED? Somethin
A ..CONFERENCE WITH YOUR PET...?
HEY, IT'S NOT THAT WEIRD --I HAVE FRIENDS WHO TALK TO THEIR CARS.
YES. WELL.. I BELIEVE IT IS YOUR TURN NOW TO SPIN ANOTHER TALE
OKAY, LET'S SEE

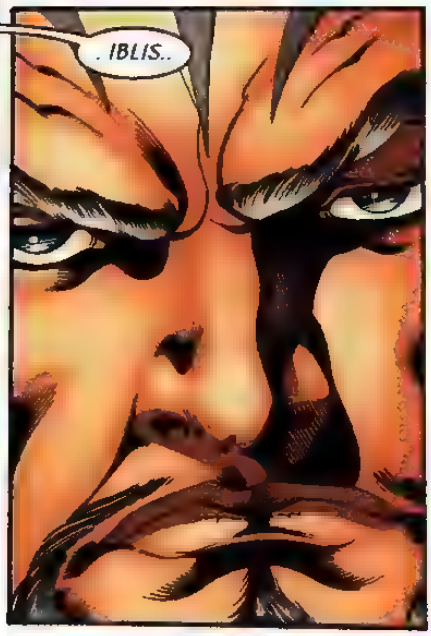
RATHER THAN TELL YOU ABOUT YET ANOTHER OF *MY* BOYFRIENDS, I'LL MENTION ONE OF *GEN'S*
'GEN MET *LYEL* WHILE STUDYING AT THE NOUVEAU SEMINARY SHE'D ALMOST NEVER LOOKED TWICE AT A BOY, BUT LYEL SEEMED *DIFFERENT* THAN THE REST
HE WAS SENSITIVE, HE WROTE POETRY, HE WAS UNBELIEVABLY NEAT AND IN PERFECT SHAPE
THAT'S RIGHT, SHE *DID* GO ON A DATE OR TWO BEFORE GETTING TOGETHER WITH THIERRY
' AND HE EVEN MANAGED TO LOOK GOOD IN THOSE SILLY SKIRTS THE NOUVEAUS MAKE THEIR MEN WEAR!
OF COURSE, I REALIZED PRETTY QUICKLY THAT IT WOULD *NEVER* WORK, BUT I HAD TO MAKE *GEN* UNDERSTAND, SO I GOT HER TO COME OUT WITH ME FOR A VERY RARE NIGHT ON THE TOWN
IT MIGHT SOUND CRUEL, BUT I *HAD* TO DO IT
'NEITHER ONE OF THEM WOULD HAVE EVER ADMITTED THE *TRUTH* IF THEY HADN'T BEEN FORCED TO.

DON'T MISUNDERSTAND. I HAD NOTHING *AGAINST* LYEL. LATER ON, I EVEN FIXED HIM UP WITH MY FRIEND GUY
BUT HE AND GEN HAD ONLY GOTTEN TOGETHER BECAUSE THEY WERE *SAFE* FOR EACH OTHER
LYEL WASN'T READY TO GO PUBLIC, AND SHE WASN'T READY FOR ANYTHING BEYOND A PECK ON THE CHEEK -- WHICH IS AS FAR AS THEY PUSHED IT -- EVEN IF GEN DIDN'T KNOW *WHY*.
IT WAS A *FOOL'S PARADISE*.


WELL TOLD, GISELLE! I COULD SPEND ONE THOUSAND AND ONE EVENINGS LISTENING TO YOU
YES, I'M SURE YOU *COULD*.


BUT THE *THEME* OF YOUR TALES GROWS A BIT *REPETITIVE*. THEY'RE *ALL* ABOUT FALSE APPEARANCES AND HIDDEN TRUTHS FORCEFULLY REVEALED


Oh, SO I FINALLY GOT *THROUGH* TO YOU? I WAS STARTING TO WONDER JUST HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE BEFORE YOU'D FACE THE TRUTH AROUND *HERE*


..IBLIS..

GISELLE VILLARD, YOU ARE INDEED A *REVELATION.*
MASTER ATYAAH THOUGHT YOU NAUGHT BUT A SHALLOW GIRL. I CAN SEE THAT YOUR *TRUE* DEPTHS HAVE YET TO BE MEASURED
TIS A SHAME WE COULD NOT TRADE TALES FOR A WHILE LONGER
IT IS MY FAVORITE PASTIME. AND IN YOUR OWN WAY YOUR SKILLS RIVALED THOSE OF JINAI HERSELF
I WAS IN NO GREAT HURRY TO *DESTROY* YOU, LITTLE MYSTIC

WHEN SHE FIRST RA SED HER ARMY OF *MAGICAL BEASTS* AND SET THEM TRAMPLING ACROSS THE GLOBE, I FELT THE SURGE OF ENERGY ROLL IN LIKE THE SPRING FLOODS
AND I RECOGNIZED THIS NVASION AS THE *OPPORTUNITY* FOR WHICH I HAD WAITED TEN THOUSAND LIFETIMES
I *LET* THE MONSTERS DEMOLISH THE PALTRY WORKS OF MAN BEFORE MARSHALLING THE DJINN FORCES AGAINST THEM
FOR THOUGH THE MAGICAL BEASTS WERE A THREAT TO HUMANS, THEY WERE A *FEAST* TO THE DJINN!
AFTER CENTURIES OF HUMILIATING *DEPENDENCY* ON THE SONS OF *MUD*, THE CHILDREN OF FLAME REIGNED ONCE AGAIN SUPREME --
FLUSH WITH THE STOLEN ENERGIES OF A DARK GODDESS WHO WOULD NOT SURVIVE TO REC.AIM THEM

AND NOW YOU *THREATEN* MY NEW ORDER. IT IS WITH *REGRET* THAT I MUST--
-WHUNG-
THAT WASN'T *MAGIC*
NO. IT *WASN'T*

IT'S SOMETHING CALLED *THE SIGIL*
AND IN ADDITION TO WORKING MAGIC, IT CAN CHANNEL THE RAW UNIVERSAL ENERGIES DIRECTLY
ENERGIES THAT ARE STILL OFF-LIMITS TO *YOU*
SO PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME DO THAT AGAIN, BECAUSE I REALLY DON'T WANT TO FIGHT YOU
WHAT *DO* YOU WANT ?
DUHH..WHAT HAVE I BEEN TELLING YOU ALL DAY?! I WANT YOU TO STOP LIVING A *LIE!*
YOU'RE THE INVENTOR OF MAGIC, YOU'VE TALKED TO GOD HERSELF, AND YET YOU'D BE HAPPY TO LIVE IN AN *ILLUSION* 'TIL THE *JUICE* YOU STOLE FROM OL' SCALE-FACE RUNS DRY? *GET REAL!*
THIS IS A CHANCE TO SHOW EVERYONE THAT YOU'RE *NOT* THE CONCEITED, SELF-CENTERED MONSTER THEY PAINT YOU AS IN THEIR MYTHS!
DO THE RIGHT THING AND THESE PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET WHO GAVE THEM BACK THEIR LIVES! AND NEITHER WOULD *THE WOMAN UPSTAIRS*."
YOU COULD *START* BY RELEASING MASTER ATYAAH

I EXPECT NOT EVEN THIS *RESTORATION* WILL ERASE YOUR PEOPLE'S FEAR OF ME
SOMETIMES FEAR IS A *GOOD* THING IT KEEPS *COMPLACENCY* AT BAY

WISELY PUT, GUILD MASTER *FAREWELL!*
GISELLE VILLARD, HOW CAN WE EVER THANK YOU?

EASY JUST TAKE A LITTLE WALK WITH ME --

--TO THE *SPIRIT PLANE..*

THERE'S SOMEONE HERE I'M SURE YOU'LL BE HAPPY TO SEE...
I HOPE YOU GUYS CAUGHT ALL OF THAT
YES, GISELLE I CONVINCED THE DJINN SPIRIT TO WATCH AS SOON AS I REALIZED WHAT YOU WERE UP TO
MASTER JINAI! I HAD LOST ALL HOPE OF EVER SEEING YOU AGAIN!
MARK YOUR WORDS, ATYAAH IF THIS GIRL CAN OUTWIT THE KING OF DJINNS, THEN PERHAPS ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE
'JINAI,' huh? ARE YOU ?
THE VERY SAME THOUGH, WHAT TOOK ME ONE THOUSAND AND ONE TALES TO ACCOMPLISH, YOU ACHIEVED WITH THREE
Blame it on modern entertainment People's attention spans just ain't what they usedta be

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MYSSPELLINGS

Please let us know if you don't want your name and address printed. Mark your e-mails as "okay to print." Letters may be edited for content and length.

Dear MysSpellings,

After reading my letter in MYSTIC #24, and after reading MYSTIC #24 itself, I felt the need to apologize. The comic is excellent; I really enjoyed issue #24, and can't wait for issue #25. The artwork is great and Tony Bedard is doing a fantastic job. I hope he will introduce us to better and more magical places, people, and things. Thank you, and keep up the great work!

Aaron Grono
Jediphoenix2000@yahoo.com

Good to hear from you again, Aaron. It takes a big man to admit when he's wrong. Thanks for sticking with us and I'm glad you're now enjoying the book.

❖

Dear MysSpellings,

Hi. I'm new to the whole CrossGen Universe, and I must say that I'm glad that I finally decided to explore it. I picked up MYSTIC #25 and I loved it.

I wish I had picked up CrossGen books earlier, but I could hardly find a shop in my area. After I did, I knowingly passed them all by. That was because I was hesitant about coming into a series so late. But, when I finally picked up MYSTIC, I was indeed happy that I did (by the way: 25 is my favorite number).

Well, all I can say now is to keep up the stuff. I plan to get some of the back issues of MYSTIC plus the other titles that you publish, because now I'm interested in everything CrossGen.

Brandon
KainWynd@aol.com

We're very happy to have you with us, Brandon. As it happens (and coincidental with receiving your letter) the number 25 has suddenly become one of my favorites, too. Strange, isn't it? In case you didn't know, two trade paperbacks reprinting the first 14 issues of MYSTIC are available right now and the third volume, including issues #15-#20, will be hitting the stands a mere one week after this book you're reading now. Our trades are a convenient and cost-effective way to catch up on what you've missed. Or, you could try our Comics on the Web at (www.comicsontheweb.com).

❖

MysSpellings:

I can't believe you guys did it. I thought I had finally gotten over the great Brandon Peterson's run in MYSTIC, and you guys go and give us this wonderful guest artist whose style is totally Petersonian (I created a word!). Oh, well, I guess any guy is allowed to have a relapse into Brandonville (I created another word!).

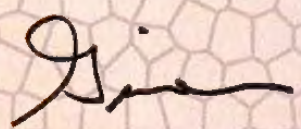
MYSTIC #25 was a great comic. I am continually impressed by the fact that MYSTIC becomes better and better each month. I really liked the villain, Duke Abaddon, this month; he is one creepy character. All right, let me once again state my love for the fact that Mr. Bedard is coupling Gen and Thierry. Giselle's guilt trip on herself at the opening was really what the character deserved, and I was happy to see that later in the issue Giselle took control of her life for the first time in the entire series by leaving the party girl she once was behind and embracing her role as Mystic.

I am also impressed by the new path the book appears to be taking. Since I first picked up MYSTIC I have been curious to see how the other Guilds operate, and now my dream is coming true. Yeah! I really enjoyed a villain who pulls the skin onto his skeleton. It's an interesting concept and was executed beautifully by Al Rio. Speaking of Mr. Rio, if you haven't yet signed him onto CrossGen exclusively, do so immediately. His style would match so many of CrossGen's books (like MERIDIAN and SOJOURN) and he really is a talented guy. His art is nicely detailed, with great camera angles and a good grasp of the human figure. He's the kind of guy I wouldn't mind sticking around as permanent guest penciler on MYSTIC.

I hope the other trips to the various Guilds are as exciting as this one.

Robert Taylor
smsuso@core.com

Well, we certainly had an offbeat adventure with our foray into Shaman lands this issue, Robert, and Djinn and Astral excursions are on tap in the next two months, followed by the rest of the Guilds in due course. I loved Al Rio's work as well, and although an exclusive with us seems to be out of the question at the moment, he will be making his next CrossGen appearance in MYSTIC #30, and we'll always be open to using him whenever we can work it in to our respective schedules.



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MYSTIC (in the subject line)

AND THE *MORAL* OF THE STORY IS--

NO, NO. DON'T OVER-EXPLAIN IT. THE WHOLE POINT IS FOR THE LISTENER TO ARRIVE AT THE MEANING FOR HIMSELF.

OKAY. SO...? WHAT'D YOU THINK?

WELL, IT *DOES* TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOU, BUT IT IS NOT QUITE WHAT I MEANT WHEN I ASKED YOU TO *TELL ME A STORY.*

YIKES!

SEVEN SPIRITS...I KNEW IT WOULD BE BAD, BUT I'D HOPED FOR BETTER THAN *THIS!*

YES, THE DEMON QUEEN'S ONSLAUGHT WAS CRUEL INDEED...